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Caltrans
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RE: Marin 101 "HOV gap filler" project DEIR/DEIS

Route 101 in Marin County seems unique for a California freeway. Route 101 has bus stops at most of the interchanges on the freeway. Golden Gate Transit operates a bus service that makes use of those bus stops. The buses serving those bus stops cannot make effective use of the existing HOV (High Occupancy Vehicle) lanes near the freeway median. To use the HOV lanes the buses would have to weave back and forth through traffic between the bus stops on the right and the HOV lane on the left. The buses have the capability to have the highest occupancy of any vehicles using the freeway.

Here's an alternative suggestion for this project, which I request that Caltrans study as part of this environmental review process. It appears to me to offer the possibility for providing better transit service through the Route 101 corridor, while using a lesser amount of funding.

First, additional users should be attracted to transit by providing restrooms and secure bicycle parking facilities that are easily accessible to the freeway bus stops. Many more potential transit users live within easy bicycling range of the freeway bus stops, compared with the number of potential transit users who live within easy walking distance of them. With secure bicycle parking, some users of the Route 101 corridor could be encouraged to commute by having two bicycles. They could use one bicycle to commute between home and transit, and the other bicycle to commute between transit and their work.

After bicycle parking becomes available at the freeway bus stops, as an alternative to HOV lanes Caltrans could construct one or two "HOV Zones" along Route 101. A "HOV Zone" would involve a separated right side bypass lane for buses and HOV's, which would branch off to the right from the main line of the freeway. The main line of the freeway would then effectively meter the other traffic as it passed through a lane drop, which the buses and HOV's could bypass to the right.

There already is a model for giving preferences to HOV's by metering other traffic. It is the toll plaza for the San Francisco -Oakland Bay Bridge. The bypass lanes for buses and HOV carry a significant percentage of all the people crossing that bridge during peak periods. The buses could serve the bus stops along the freeway, and would not be slowed by backed up traffic at the lane drop area, or their previous operational need to weave in and out between the bus stops on the right and the HOV lanes on the left.

This would also have the advantage of educating motorists. They would quickly learn that, whenever traffic volume reached a certain point, there would be more or less guaranteed congestion at the same spot every day. This would act as an incentive for more motorists to consider using transit along the Marin 101 corridor.

It should also be relatively cheap and easy to measure potential bicyclist usage of the existing transit services by the simple expedient of having a truck travel in convoy with a bus on publicized selected bus route runs. The truck could haul the bicycles while the bicyclists ride on the bus.

It appears that you have enough room to construct a southbound HOV zone south of Lucas Valley Road, and a northbound HOV zone south of the Sir Francis Drake interchange, near Lucky Drive. You might want to first experiment with northbound Route 101 to the north of the last interchange in Novato. I request that you study these ideas as an alternative to your proposed project.

Sincerely yours,

